

"The seventeenth century was an era of peace that permitted the Laotian arts to flourish. The insouciance, which is a Laotian characteristic, explains the fragility of their innumerable monuments. In the South, Khmer influence predominates; in the North, Burmese. Under this double aegis temples, libraries, and reliquaries have been built by the Laotians without originality but always with grace and elegance. The pitiless tropical vegetation has strangled almost all of them: even the Vat Prakeo, which the French have tried to save, seems doomed to destruction. The wood sculpture is of gigantic proportions and fashioned in the expressionless attitude of the Buddhist liturgy. The painting, which consists of frescoes in the pagodas, was the work of foreign artists of whom the Laotians were only the pupils. It is in jewellery and the working of precious metals that the Laotians have shown their most inventive artistry. Like all Far Eastern peoples they are very clever at basketry and weaving."

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or less degree lightens its rather dark color. The skirt is a true cylinder, with the same diameter all along its length. A woman raises the skirt in a mass like a crown above her head, lets it slide down along her body and fastens it to her waist, without any hooks or fasteners, by tucking it in along her stomach, which is largely left bare. A brightly colored sash of cotton or silk is thrown over one shoulder, sometimes covering the breasts, to complete the costume.

"During the cold season, where there is a winter, a few women cover their trunks with a short jacket. This garment finds favor mainly outside the larger centers.

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"A certain number of women wear their hair cut in Bressant style, in accordance with the style imported by the Siamese. The greater number wear their long hair rolled into a coil on the top or side of the head. Women's coiffures vary, moreover, depending on the region and on whether they are married or single.

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"For great ceremonies, wealthy women wear skirts made of cloth spangled with gold or silver, and sashes of the same type.

"In Luang-Prabang they add a silk or velvet jacket decorated with embroidery on the neck, front and cuffs. Merchants can be found in this city who rent out costumes of this type, as well as gold jewelry, for great ceremonies to women who do not have any."
(Le Laos français.)

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Jewelry. Jewels find great favor among the [179] Laotians and are used to complete and enrich their costume. They are not only ornaments, but also the most widespread method for realizing and preserving the liquid part of their fortune. In fact, the inhabitants transform the greater part of [Illustration here] their savings and profits into jewelry, and since they wear them on their body they are spared the use of strongboxes.

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The women and children are the ones who wear jewels most. They go into the trousseau of the young bride, and parents give them to their children as the latter grow up, thus putting together a sort of dowry for the time when they reach the age of marriage.

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[180] Gold and silver are used in making jewelry, and precious stones such as rubies, sapphires and various genuine or imitation gems are sometimes added as ornaments.

Gold is not used in all parts of Laos, but is mainly limited to the large centers located near regularly worked gold-bearing deposits.

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Doubtless because of the application of ancient sumptuary laws, silver is the only metal used by certain races--even by the Khas,

who work gold mines--and by the inhabitants of several regions, whose state of fortune would nevertheless enable them to use a more precious metal.

Jewelry and examples of the goldsmith's art are found in different forms and types which vary greatly with the region and race, as will be seen by the nomenclature given in Chapter IX.

Food. The Laotian scorns the pleasures of the table, and is generally a moderate eater and drinker. Steam-cooked glutinous rice forms the basis of his food supply. To this he adds salt, peppers, various other spices, fresh or preserved fish, etc. Besides these, but less frequently, his day-to-day diet may be varied with poultry, eggs, buffalo meat, beef and pork, as well as venison. To be sure, it is mainly on the occasion of public or private festivals, which are fairly numerous in the course of the year, that the Laotian improves on his usual rather frugal fare in this way.

The customary beverage is water which may be taken directly from the rivers or first be hastily decanted into jars or water-coolers of porous earthenware. In general, Laotians prefer water taken directly from the river to that which has been filtered. Finally, the people of Laos consume rice brandy which is obtained by distillation, and a kind of beer made by cold fermentation of rice mixed with paddy husks.

The use of these drinks, aside from rare exceptions, is reserved for holidays.

Physical appearance, character, occupations. The Laotian's character is, in general, mild, friendly and happy. His physiognomy is [181] open and smiling. Not quarrelsome by nature, he even shrinks from coming to blows in extreme cases and prefers to end a dispute with an outburst of laughter rather than with blows.

Since, all in all, it has few needs and inhabits a land with luxuriant vegetation which is abundantly favored with products to be had for the scavenging, this happy people can easily satisfy its needs and be content with its fate. [Illustration alongside text here.]

It is assuredly lazy, but out of indifference much rather than out of any deliberate intent. It cannot grasp the advantage or utility of a regular and prolonged effort beyond what is strictly necessary to provide it with a living and a few distractions to which, in reality, its own joyous disposition makes the greatest contribution.

To the men are reserved the chief tasks, which have a more virile and noble character than those which are the women's lot.

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Laotians AM8
Tribal Tai

291 cover their bust with a small short jacket which is very close-fitting and bright in color. It has a heart-shaped opening on the chest and, like the men's jacket, is ornamented with galloons and passementerie. For celebrations and ceremonies Lu women wear a heavy turban on their head which is folded flat or pleated, shaped like a mitre and generally made of black silk spangled with gold.

301 Both men and women pierce the lobes of their ears [246] with a broad opening, into which they introduce hollow gold or silver cylinders which are sometimes as large as three centimeters in diameter.

306 Great lovers of jewelry, the Lus number skilled jewelers and goldsmiths among them who make hair coil plaques, ear cylinders, flat braided metal belts with wide chased and checkered buckles, bracelets, rings, hilts and sheaths for daggers and swords, etc. [Illustration alongside text here]

411 The Lus almost always wear daggers and swords. Each of them, so to speak, possesses a rifle, generally flintlock, which by the shape of the stock, the length of the barrel and the many bands which adorn it greatly resembles the long Moukhala so dear to our Arabs in Algeria.

293 [361] Lu villages are clean, and the houses are arranged in a checker-board pattern.

[311] The Lus have a high reputation as breeders of oxen and horses.

527 A great lover of celebrations and parades, this boisterous people sets off gunpowder at every opportunity, and there is no festival, private or public, so small that it is not accompanied by salvos and fireworks.

[171] From their contact with the Burmese the men have retained a [247] [Illustration] [248] [Blank page] [249] taste for dancing and for sword fights mingled with dance steps in which they manifest a real grace and elegance.

535 "Among other forms of amusement, the men execute, with a truly remarkable suppleness and skill, sword dances which are perfectly elegant. Naked to the waist, with their trousers rolled up and bunched and a wooden sword in each hand whose cutting edge has been dipped in dye, so that the thrusts will leave a mark, the two champions confront one another. Moulinets, parries and returns follow one another without apparent effort, and the movements are undulating and rapid but without any abruptness. The men seem to be caressing one another, not fighting, and yet the slashes leave their colored traces on the skin of the vanquished. Direct thrusts are forbidden, but the entire body from head to foot is fair game for the opponent. Thus during the

326 Gold and silver smiths and jewelry-making. In
306 nearly all the large centers there are gold and silver smiths who are
also jewelry-makers. They work either on their own behalf manu-
facturing articles which they then sell, or else on order for individuals
who wish to transform silver coins which they have saved over the
years, or native gold which they have obtained by gold-washing or
purchase, into gold and silver articles or jewelry.

The Laotian silversmiths and jewelers use very few tools. A
bellows, a crucible, a few pairs of tongs, some drawplates, caulking
chisels, graving tools and hammers are all they need to cast, forge,
braze, draw, laminate, chase, and checker gold and silver.

The different phases of the work include casting the metal either
with or without alloy (1), laminating it with a hammer and drawing

(1) The alloys are tin and copper for silver, and always silver
for gold.

It partly with a hammer and partly with a drawplate, embossing it,
chasing it, checkering it, brazing on filigree or globular ornaments,
and giving a patina to and burnishing the finished product.

The patina is obtained on silver by dipping it in lemon juice and
tempering it while hot in a strong alum solution.

Gold jewelry is usually covered with a reddish patina which has
a very warm color. This is obtained by tempering it in boiling water
containing, by weight;

2 parts of saltpeter.

3 parts of salt.

1 part of alum.

Sufficient quantities of sulphur.

[531] [456] All the artists work from uniform models. The decorative
motifs are taken from Brahminic tradition, with a few modifications
arising out of the introduction of certain elements which are derived
from Chinese art.

Yet the Laotians are capable of producing work which is not
based on their usual models. Thus a great many jeweler-goldsmiths
can reproduce designs which are different in shape, appearance and
style from the common types which are handed down from father to
son or from master to pupil.

The usual gold and silver articles include betel services, vases,
cups, boxes, knife handles and sword hilts. Generally these objects
are made of silver, but sometimes also of gold. The jewelry includes

326 bracelets, necklaces, rings, long neck chains and chignon chains,
306 hairpins, buckles, buttons, earrings, etc., either of gold or of silver.

The purity of the metals used in this work varies widely, and is usually left to the choice of the person who commissions the work. In some cases gold is left free of any alloy, while often a fourth part of silver is used and sometimes even more.

Silver taken from coins is left as pure as it was originally, or else its purity is decreased by alloying it with copper and tin.

The precious stones used in jewelry include sapphires, rubies, quartz, crystal, onyx, glass and even basalts. Cutting facets on gems is unknown in Laos, and only cabochon cutting, which may be more or less regular, is practiced.

326 Ironmongery. The blacksmiths of Laos are quite skillful. Their extremely scant equipment includes a double-action bellows, one or two pairs of tongs, two or three hammers, a hot set and a small anvil. They use only wood charcoal.

By taking plenty of time they are nevertheless able, using bars of soft iron imported from Europe, deadheads, and "Duongs" which come from the high primitive furnaces [457] of the Kouli region, to forge various tools and utensils such as machetes, swords, knives, scissors, spades, bits, elephant halters, carmac hooks, etc.

Each blacksmith has his own specialty. With the help of routinism and by virtue of constant repetition of the same forms, these artisans manage to acquire a real skill and to utilize every last scrap of iron. It should also be noted that iron is very expensive. It costs from 30 to 70 francs per hundred kilograms in Laos, and sometimes as much as 90 or even 110 francs.

A certain number of articles, such as plowshares, spade irons, axes, etc. are imported from China and Siam.

323 Pottery. The pottery industry is very active, and in spite
415 of the many imported pots made of wrought, enamel or cast iron or copper, the industry still makes a large number of pots and vases of every size and shape which are destined for various uses.

The potters of Laos produce glazed jars which serve as receptacles for alcohol and water, water coolers, flower vases, drinking mugs, oil lamps, cuspidors, smooth and rough mortars, tiles, brick, drains,

[439] ornamental modillions, etc. The products of this industry are mainly destined for local consumption. Some of them, however, also find markets in nearby countries.